

THE RED EAR

By Marcella Dubois

With a shriek of excitement and glee the prettiest girl at Farmer Doane's husking bee jumped up from the stool she had occupied, scattering a great heap of corn all about her and daringly, invitingly waved above her head the third red ear found within the hour. There was a grand rush after her as she darted through the broad open doorway of the great barn out into the moonlight, to lead her eager pursuers a brisk chase.

There was one young man who did not join the group, however. This was Abel Drake. Also, taking no part in the mad rush, but smiling indulgently after the receding mad, laughing cheering crowd, Alice Leslie kept on mechanically tearing the husk from the ear of corn in her hand. She was not conscious that she had uncovered the tip of a blood-red ear until the companion by her side and escort uttered the quick words in eager breathlessness:

"Why, Alice, you are a lucky one, too!"

He was a bashful, reticent young fellow, and as Alice flushed his embarrassment was equal to her own. The penalty of finding a red ear was a kiss, but Alice had not invited a chase for the conquest. Her eyes wore almost a frightened look. As Abel, smiling slightly, moved toward her, in his ardent soul craving the salute as the fondest boon in the world, she shrank back.

"Oh, please no!" she fluttered. "Nobody ever kissed me — except my brother."

"Nobody ever let me kiss them at all," observed Abel, quite gravely. "I wish I was your brother!" and then he added: "But don't deny me one pleasure, Alice. Let me have the red ear as a—a memento, won't you?"

She extended it toward him eagerly. Her heart thrilled, almost sorry was she that she had denied this

honest-eyed, clean, earnest, lovable fellow his wish. He was a loyal friend and she knew that he fairly worshiped her. She tried to make amends by being more than gentle and attentive to him the rest of the evening. She was touched infinitely as she noted that he placed the red ear inside his vest on the side nearest to his heart.

Alice talked of a social gathering a week ahead as though it was a settled fact that Abel would be her escort upon that occasion as usual. He



"Nobody Ever Kissed Me — Except My Brother."

was not very responsive, however, and left her at the home door as though something had depressed and chilled him.

"Poor fellow!" sighed Alice regretfully, as they finally parted. "He is so good and true and I am afraid I hurt his feelings. I hope he does not think I would rather have somebody else—oh, dear! I wish—"

That he had kissed her! There, that was the truth, and she hid her bonny face in her hands, half-shamed